

CHIP eligibility standards changed

By Gazette News Services

HELENA -- Eligibility guidelines for Montana's insurance plan for low-income children are changing because of a recent change in the federal definition of "poverty."

To be eligible for the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP, a family's income must be at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, which are calculated each year using the Consumer Price Index and statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau.

This year's guidelines were released Jan. 24 and took effect Wednesday.

The new CHIP eligibility guidelines say a family of four may have up to \$30,000 a year in annual income. That's an increase of \$975 from last year, according to the state Department of Public Health and Human Services.

CHIP gives credit for some work-related expenses, so children may be eligible even if their family income is slightly over the income guideline, the DPHHS said.

About 12,000 children are currently enrolled in the program, which is funded with both state and federal money.